APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

SPECIFICATION

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Title: **Routing Method for Mobile Wireless Nodes Having Overlapping Internet Protocol Home Addresses**

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to the subject of mobile Internet Protocol ("IP") data networking.

B. Description of Related Art

Public packet switched networks can be used to carry traffic to and from a mobile communications device, such as a laptop computer or personal digital assistant equipped with a cellular telephone modem. The basic architecture of mobile IP data networking is known in the art and described in several publications, including the Request for Comments document RFC 2002 (1996) and in the textbook of Charles E. Perkins, *Mobile IP Design Principles and Practices,* Addison-Wesley Wireless Communications Series (1998), the contents of both of which are incorporated by reference herein.

Basically, in Mobile IP communication, a wireless mobile node communicates with a terminal on an IP network by means of a foreign agent and a home agent. Typically, foreign agent functionality is incorporated into a network access server chassis located on a mobile node's visited network. The foreign agent provides routing services for the mobile node while it is registered with the foreign agent. A Point-to-Point Protocol (PPP) session is established between the mobile node and the foreign agent. The foreign agent de-tunnels and delivers datagrams to the mobile node that were tunneled by the mobile node's home agent.

The home agent is usually a router on a mobile node's home network that tunnels datagrams for delivery to the mobile node via the foreign agent when the mobile node is away from home. The home agent maintains current location information for the mobile node, through a variety of possible mechanisms, such as described in the patent application of Richard J.

Dynarski, et al., "Dynamic Allocation of Wireless Mobile Nodes Over an Internet Protocol (IP) Network", serial no. 09/233,381, which is incorporated by reference herein. When multiple home agents are handling calls for multiple mobile nodes simultaneously, the home agents are providing, in essence, a service analogous to virtual private network services. Each mobile node is typically associated with a separate home network. The routing path from that home network, through the home agent, to the foreign agent and mobile node is like a virtual private network for the mobile node.

The situation can arise in which two mobile nodes are simultaneously registered with a foreign agent, and have established a PPP session with the foreign agent, but the two mobile nodes have the same home network IP address. In a typical prior art foreign agent implementation, the overlapping IP addresses will cause an IP routing failure, since more than one routing table entry could have the same network address associated with different PPP links. This overlapping IP address for both mobile nodes could be a consequence of the home network assigning the same IP address to the mobile node, either *a priori* or during the mobile IP registration process.

Accordingly, there is a need in the art for a method for handling overlapping IP address pools in a foreign agent. The present invention solves that need and provides methods by which a foreign agent can correctly route packets to a from any number of mobile nodes that are simultaneously registered with the foreign agent but have the same home network IP address.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In a first aspect, a method is provided for routing a data packet through a foreign agent to a wireless node. The method is specifically designed to handle the situation where multiple wireless nodes are registered with the foreign agent but have the same home network IP addresses. The method begins by receiving a data packet at the foreign agent from a home agent associated with wireless node. The foreign agent uniquely associates a home Internet Protocol (IP) address and a home agent IP address contained in the data packet with a Point-to-Point Protocol (PPP) link address. The PPP link address is associated with a PPP link previously established between the foreign agent and the wireless node. This association is preferably implemented in software a table. The foreign agent forwards the data packet through the foreign agent to the PPP link (with the addressing done by reference to the table) for transmission to the wireless node.

In a preferred implementation, the foreign agent maintains a table mapping PPP link addresses to unique pairs of home IP addresses and home agent IP addresses. The step of associating the incoming packet from the home agent is performed automatically in the foreign agent by reference to the table. Since each wireless node having the same home network IP address will have a different home agent, multiple wireless nodes having the same home IP addresses but different home agent IP address may be distinguished from each other in the table and the foreign agent can correctly identify the PPP link to forward the packet to the proper wireless node.

In the reverse direction, the foreign agent receives packets from the wireless nodes, and some of the wireless nodes may have the same home network IP addresses. However, the wireless nodes having the same home network IP address will be associated with a separate PPP

link. Be reference to the table, the foreign agent can determine which home agent to forward the packet to, since the home agents are uniquely identified with a home agent IP address and a PPP link address associated with the packet received from the wireless node. The result is that in both directions, the foreign agent can handle the situation where multiple wireless nodes are active in the foreign agent but have the same home network IP address. If conventional IP routing methods were performed, this would not be possible.

These and other features and aspects of the invention will be described in further detail in the following specification.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram showing the basic architecture for providing mobile IP networking services for a plurality of wireless nodes, two of which happen to have the same home network IP address.

Figure 2 is a illustration of a portion of the table that is maintained in the foreign agent that is used to route packets to the wireless nodes and to the home agents in accordance with a principal aspect of the invention.

Figure 3 is a flow diagram illustrating the method performed by the foreign agent for forwarding of packets from mobile nodes to their respective home agent.

Figure 4 is a flow diagram illustrating the method implemented in the foreign agent for forwarding of packets from the home agent to the mobile nodes.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT OF THE INVENTION

Overview of Representative Network System for Mobile IP nodes

Referring now to Figure 1, a basic architecture for providing IP networking services for a group of mobile nodes is shown schematically. In the example of Figure 1, two wireless users, designated 10A and 10B, exchange IP packets with host computers on their home networks 11A and 11B, respectively. The wireless users or nodes send and receive IP packets by means of a radio access network 12 (the details of which are not important) and a PPP link 16 established with a remote access server 13 functioning as a mobile IP foreign agent (also known in the art as an IWU/FA or Interworking Unit/Foreign Agent). The foreign agent 13 has an IP address (e.g., "C") which is used for tunneling data packets from the home agents 20 to the foreign agent in accordance with the mobile IP protocol.

The foreign agent 13 is on a network 14 maintained by a provider of mobile IP service, such as a wireless communications company or other suitable entity. The foreign agent 13 may be of the general type of device described in the patent of Dale M. Walsh et al., US Patent 5,528,595 and assigned to the assignee of the present invention. Such network access servers are available from companies such as 3Com Corporation and Lucent Technologies. Basically, the network access server/ foreign agent implements foreign agent functions as specified by RFC 2002 and provide access to an IP local or wide area network 14 for the mobile nodes.

IP packets for the mobile devices are tunneled to the foreign agent 13 by a home agent in accordance with the Mobile IP protocol. In the example of Figure 1, a home agent 20A for mobile node 10A is connected by one more intermediate networks 22 to the home network 11A for the mobile wireless node 10A. Similarly, the IP packets from the home network 11B are

transmitted over one or more intermediate networks to the home agent 20B, where they are tunneled to the foreign agent 13 for transmission to the mobile wireless node 10B.

Each home agent 20 typically comprises a router with an interface to the local area network 14 and a wide area network interface that connects the home agent to intermediate networks 22 (which may be an Asynchronous Transfer Mode network, frame relay network, or other type of network). The backhaul network 22 is in turn connected via suitable routers to the individual home networks 11A, 11B of the mobile nodes 10A, 10B respectively.

In the present example, mobile nodes 10A and 10B are assigned the same home IP address, say "A". Both of them are connected to the same foreign agent and have the same mobile IP foreign agent care-of-address of "C" (IP address of foreign agent 13), for tunneling purposes. Ideally, the foreign agent 13 tunnels traffic from the mobile node 10A to the home agent 20A, which in turn routes it via intermediate networks to the home network 11A for the mobile node. Similarly, the foreign agent 13 tunnels traffic from the mobile node 10B to the home agent 20B, which in turn routes it via intermediate networks to the home network 11B for the mobile node.

The problem with this situation is that, with both mobile nodes having the same IP addresses on their home networks, if the foreign agent 13 uses conventional IP routing schemes (as is the case for remote access servers), it would not be able to properly route the IP packets from the mobile nodes to the home agents. Similarly, in the opposite direction the foreign agent 13 would not be able to determine which mobile node 10A or 10B the packet is intended for since the mobile nodes have the same home network IP address.

The present invention addresses this problem. Instead of using conventional IP routing, a preferred embodiment of the invention associates the address of the PPP link 16 between the

mobile node and the foreign agent to the IP tunneling information needed to correctly route the packets to the proper home agent. In the direction of home agent to mobile node, the foreign agent receives a data packet associated with one of the wireless nodes from the respective home agent. The foreign agent maintains a tunneling table associating a home network IP address and a home agent IP address contained in the data packet with a Point-to-Point Protocol (PPP) link address in the foreign agent. The PPP link address identifies the PPP link that is established between the foreign agent and the wireless node. Since the home agent IP address and home network IP address form a unique pair or set of information, they can be used to uniquely, and correctly, identify the associated PPP link for the packet and accordingly can be used to tie any IP packets from the foreign agent to and from the mobile node via the table. The foreign agent forwards the data packet to the PPP link for transmission to the mobile node by reference to the table.

Figure 2 is an illustration of a representative tunneling table 50 maintained in software by the foreign agent and used to correctly route packets to and from the mobile nodes when the overlapping IP pool situation is presented. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the method in detail.

With reference to Figures 2-4, the process begins at step 70 when a PPP link or session is established between the mobile node 10A or 10B and the foreign agent 13. During establishment of the session and negotiation of protocols, such as IP Control Protocol (IPCP), the foreign agent will allow the same IP address assignment for the mobile node, that is, it will disregard the fact that another mobile node is registered with the foreign agent with the same IP address.

Once the PPP link negotiation is completed, the foreign agent will perform mobile IP discovery procedures and wait for registration request messages from the mobile node. When a

registration request message is received the foreign agent proceeds with registering with mobile node, indicated in step 72.

Once registration of the mobile node is completed, the home network IP address, home agent IP address and PPP link addresses are saved in a tunneling table, as indicate at step 74, such as the table illustrated in Figure 2. The tunneling table can only be created after a successful registration of the mobile node because a mobile client could request dynamically a home IP address assignment at the network layer.

In the table of Figure 2, the numbers $x_1.x_2.x_3.2$, $y_1.y_2.y_3.4$, $z_1.z_2.z_3.4$, $g_1.g_2.g_3.5$ etc. are intended to simply represent some particular IP addresses that are assigned to the PPP link in the foreign agent, the home agent, and the mobile node on the home network. The home agent IP address (e.g., $p_1.p_2.p_3.6$) and home network IP address (e.g. $z_1.z_2.z_3.4$) form a unique pair of identifiers and provide a unique PPP link address. Note that the first two entries 60 and 62 in the table 50 have the same home network IP address ($z_1.z_2.z_3.4$), but, since they have different home agent IP addresses, they have different PPP link addresses. Thus, the packets can be correctly routed to and from the mobile nodes by maintaining a table such as illustrated in Figure 2 and using the table to either identify the proper PPP link for the home agent (for traffic destined for the mobile node), or to identify the proper home agent for the mobile node (for traffic received from the mobile node and destined for the host computer on the home network).

Thus, in the forward direction, and with reference to Figure 4, an IP packet is received by the foreign agent through the IP tunnel from the home agent at step 76. The packet is decapsulated at step 78. The PPP link to forward the packet to is identified at step 80 by the outer source of the IP datagram (i.e., the home agent IP address), and the inner destination address in the datagram (i.e., the home network IP address of the mobile node). The foreign

agent refers to the table of Figure 2 to determine the PPP link to send the packet to. There is no IP routing performed in this case. The packet is forwarded at step 82 to the proper PPP link. The foreign agent then waits for another packet from the home agent at step 84 and repeats steps 76, 78, 80 and 82 for subsequent packets. Of course, this process is running in parallel in the foreign agent for all the active ports and registered mobile nodes.

In the opposite direction, and with reference to Figure 3, a packet is received from the mobile node at step 90. The packets received via each PPP link in the foreign agent is encapsulated at step 92 in accordance with the mobile IP protocol and tunneled to the proper home agent at step 94. The tunneling table of Figure 2 is used to generate the tunneling information based on the unique set of mobile node home network IP address and PPP link address to arrive at the proper home agent IP address for tunneling the packet to the home agent.

In accordance with this method, multiple wireless nodes having the same home IP addresses but different home agent IP address may be distinguished from each other in the tunneling table and proper routing in both directions can be performed.

In the preferred embodiment, the foreign agent comprises a remote access server having a plurality of ports (such as 24, 48, or even 200 or more in a high density embodiment). The remote access server is provided with appropriate software and hardware for establishing a PPP link with a wireless node at each port. Each port has its own PPP link address. Further, the table shown in Figure 2 is increased to provide routing information for all the PPP link addresses associated with the ports.

From the forgoing, it will be appreciated that we have described an improvement to a foreign agent for a plurality of wireless nodes, in which the improvement comprises providing a software program in the foreign agent for handing routing of packets through the foreign agent

for the plurality of wireless nodes having a common or overlapping home network address. The software program will typically run on either a routing card or general purpose computing platform incorporated into the foreign agent. Typically, the routing card or computing platform provides an interface between the foreign agent and a local or wide area IP network. The software program comprising a set of instructions:

(a) maintaining a table (such as shown in Figure 2) uniquely identifying links (that connect the foreign agent to the plurality of wireless nodes) to home agent addresses and home network addresses for the wireless nodes; and

(b) associating packets to be transmitted to the wireless nodes by the uniquely identified links.

Accordingly, and as explained above, wireless nodes having the same home network addresses but different home agent addresses may be distinguished from each other in the table and proper routing of packets through the foreign agent to or from the wireless nodes may be achieved. Persons skilled in the art and familiar with mobile IP data networking and foreign agents will be able to code such software instructions from the present description without undue difficulty. For example, the instructions may encode the procedure shown in Figures 3 and 4. The procedures for establishing PPP links with mobile nodes and registering of mobile nodes with a foreign agent are known in the art and described in the mobile IP data networking literature.

Persons skilled in the art will appreciate that various modifications and alterations from the presently preferred embodiment can be made without departure from the true scope and spirit of the invention. This true scope and spirit is defined by the appended claims, to be interpreted in light of the foregoing.

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